

THE BLESSED THISTLE IN VIRGINIA

A. B. MASSEY

The blessed thistle, (*Cnicus benedictus*, L.) was introduced into the United States, probably Virginia, in the colonial days. Fernald (*Rhodora* 46:158) questioned its persistence in the State. He found it in a clover field near Petersburg one season but found none in the same place the following year. Of course, if it is not a persistent species, it should not be listed in the state flora.

We have specimens in the V. P. I. Herbarium collected during the growing season, April to July, in Buckingham, Westmoreland, Albemarle, Shenandoah, Nansemond, Henrico, Goochland, Accomac, Mecklenburg and Amherst Counties. Collections were made on the same farm in Amherst County in 1944 and 1947. Fernald records it in Dinwiddie County near Petersburg. Rosette stages, collected in dormant condition from Accomac (December) and Franklin (October) Counties are in the Herbarium. Allen Kates, Weed Specialist, V. P. I., Agricultural Extension Service, reports it in Halifax, Nottaway, Richmond and Northampton Counties. The oldest record of the species in Virginia is that in Gronovius' *Flora Virginica* (1762) page 117. ("Carduus benedictus caulibus, infirmis supinis, flore flavo, Clayt. n. 926") Clayton's collection was probably from the peninsula between the James and York Rivers, in eastern Virginia, known as The Middle Neck.

Clayton's early record indicates that the blessed thistle was introduced into Virginia by the early colonists. The plant contains a very bitter principle, *Cnicin*, and was considered to be an important medicinal plant. It possesses the property of "simple bitters" thought to stimulate the liver and kidneys. In the early days it was not only thought to possess medicinal properties but also prevented evil, whence the specific name — benedictus — blessed thistle.

It is evident that the species has been persistent in Virginia for many years. Fernald's collection in Dinwiddie County was in a clover field. The field was probably mowed for hay before the thistle bloomed. Being a biennial (some would call it a winter annual) its appearance the next season

was prevented by the destruction of the plants before seed formation.

Despite Fernald's apprehension to the contrary, the species is very definitely naturalized in Virginia and is to be included in the flora as are many other European species. — VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE.

SESBANIA EXALTATA (RAF.) CORY IN ESSEX COUNTY, MASSACHUSETTS. — While collecting on the city dump in Lynn, Massachusetts last fall I found a single plant of what I took to be a seedling of some woody legume. However the long even-pinnate leaves did not fit any species that I could think of. Finally through the kind assistance of Dr. Carroll E. Wood of the Arnold Arboretum it was run down to *Sesbania exaltata* (Raf.) Cory, a tall annual native to our southern states and adventive northward. This seems to be the first collection of the plant in Massachusetts. The chances of its becoming established this far North appear to be very poor since the plant showed no suggestion of flowers or buds in early October when a killing frost may occur almost any night. City dump off Broad Street, Lynn, Essex County, Massachusetts, *Stuart K. Harris 18832* (3 October 1958). Specimen in the herbarium of the New England Botanical Club. — STUART K. HARRIS, BOSTON UNIVERSITY.